

ORAL REMARKS:

Hello, I'm Marilyn Wrenn, Chief Program officer of Coalfield Development and it is my pleasure to be here today.

Coalfield Development exists to diversify the region's economy and create pathways to good paying careers for people facing barriers to employment. In West Virginia, our economy has been tied to the extraction of resources - first timber, and then fossil fuels - for generations. But the world is changing and the decline in the market for the products we are set up to produce has decimated many of our communities. We have lost thousands of jobs with no other industry as robust or as well-paying as coal jobs to take their place. We have also lost a lot of skilled people who have relocated to areas with more opportunities. The opioid epidemic that hit our rural areas hard compounded the pain of economic distress by disrupting families, and further disconnecting a generation of people from the workforce.

So a little over a decade ago, Coalfield Development started rebuilding our Appalachian economy from the ground up. We knew that we could make progress only by focusing on the employer and employee sides of the equation at the same time. Employment Social Enterprises -ESEs- became our vehicles to build employment opportunities for people while giving us the time and space to help them re-engage with employment. You can think about an ESE as a business that runs with the brain of a for-profit and the heart of a non-profit. Waged-based training is crucial since marginalized workers can't be expected to put their lives on hold to "get trained." ESEs have the added benefit of demonstrating what a diversified economy can look like and how it can function.

Our first ESE was a construction company which is still operating. We also now operate light manufacturing, agriculture, and reclamation companies. We also helped incubate the first solar company in this area. Into these we hire people who face significant barriers to employment.

Our workforce training approach combines two programs: a six-month experience called Workforce Readiness and Professional Success - or WRAPS -, and a 2.5 - 3-year program called "33-6-3". Both programs feature paid, mentor-lead, on-the job-training for 33 hours per week with 3 hours of paid personal development. During WRAPS, we work with people to solve as many barriers to long-term employment success as possible. Transportation, securing housing, finding childcare and improving health are all common barriers. Upon graduation, WRAPS

Graduates can move into our 33-6-3 program or go straight to work for another employer. If they stay employed with us, they engage in 6 hours of higher education per week, working towards an Associate's degree or a trade certification.

So far, we've created over 600 jobs, and here's what we've learned.

First, traditional skills-based training does not support the human development needs that are front and center in helping people engage with employment. Getting people to work is not just about skilling them up. It's about helping people identify and address their barriers to employment.

Second, Developing ESEs can help communities bridge the gap between social service agencies and employers. ESEs can demonstrate diverse, equitable and just hiring practices and help train other employers to flex their own hiring practices, making employment more accessible.

Third, more community-based nonprofits could engage in workforce development with the proper support. Other nonprofits are replicating our WRAPS program, and we encourage stronger communication between local nonprofits and employers.

Finally, we're moving fast, but generational issues and trauma take time to overcome. The IRA, and the Bipartisan CHIPS and Infrastructure Laws are once-in-a-generation investments, and we need to invest in local leadership and capacity, or our rural and marginalized communities will miss out on these transformative opportunities.

Thank you.